

The Testing Issue

By Tom Wicker

In their fierce competition for the Democratic Presidential nomination, Walter Mondale and Gary Hart are nevertheless in essential agreement on one profound difference between them and President Reagan:

Mr. Hart: "If I am elected President, on my first day in office I will call for a six-month suspension on testing of all nuclear weapons as the first step toward achieving a comprehensive test ban treaty." (An advertisement in *The New York Times*, March 18, 1984)

Mr. Mondale: "As President . . . I would initiate a six-month moratorium on underground nuclear testing and challenge the Soviets to respond in kind." (A speech to the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, March 14, 1984)

Since underground tests are the only kind either the U.S. or the U.S.S.R. now conduct, these propositions are fundamentally the same — and are fundamentally opposed to the position of Ronald Reagan, who is committed instead to a massive nuclear arms buildup that cannot go forward if testing is suspended.

Mr. Reagan, in pursuit of his buildup, has even broken off negotiations for a comprehensive test ban treaty. Yet the Carter Administration had virtually completed such a treaty, in which the Soviet Union had agreed to on-site inspections in its territory; and the U.S. is legally committed in the Limited Test Ban and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation treaties to seek a comprehensive test ban.

As suggested here when the testing moratorium was first proposed by Senator Alan Cranston — before he withdrew his Presidential candidacy — this could be a major issue against Mr. Reagan. The moratorium would be self-enforcing, in that the U.S. would immediately resume testing if the U.S.S.R. continued to test. It could be adequately verified by national technical means. If observed, on both sides, it might well lead to the important achievement of a comprehensive test ban.

Mr. Reagan undoubtedly will denounce the moratorium idea as a threat to national security. But the issue would be likely to sharpen the President's "warmonger" image, one of his principal weaknesses, and to arouse the enthusiasm of the big and active nuclear free movement — now in need of a specific and achievable step toward its ultimate goal.

Mr. Mondale and Mr. Hart also support the idea of a mutual and verifiable freeze on testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems. On this point,

however, Mr. Hart's position seems to freeze proponents to be ambiguous at best.

In his *New York Times* ad, for example, Mr. Hart said, "I opposed and cast my vote against the build-down proposal which came before the Senate on Oct. 31, 1983. Supported by the Reagan Administration, it was an attempt to sidetrack the nuclear freeze movement."

That vote was on a procedural motion to table, or lay aside without action, both the Kennedy-Hatfield freeze proposal and a "build-down" plan, under which old nuclear weapons would have been scrapped for every new one deployed. The build-down plan was, indeed, an effort to "sidetrack" the freeze and Mr. Hart did vote to table it as well as the freeze, as freeze proponents asked him to. But they point out that before that he had been a co-sponsor of the Nunn-Warner "build-down" proposal.

Mr. Hart also opposed a freeze resolution approved in his home state of Colorado in November 1982, freeze supporters say. For these reasons, some questioned the depth of his commitment to the freeze idea and the strength of his opposition to the build-down scheme.

Mr. Hart and Mr. Mondale are more nearly in agreement on arms control and weapons questions, however, than on some other matters of security policy. On Central America, for an important example, Mr. Mondale in his Chicago speech called for using U.S. troops in Honduras as a sort of "bargaining chip" to achieve the withdrawal of Cubans from Nicaragua as well as Nicaraguan agreement not to use Russian-made MIG's and to enter into a non-intervention agreement with its neighbors.

That sounds rather like traditional U.S. "interference" in its Central American "backyard," to order affairs there to Washington's liking. In contrast, Mr. Hart would simply withdraw American forces from Honduras; he told the Chicago foreign relations council that "Not every Third World problem is America's problem for which there is an American solution."

Instead, he suggested, "Our military or covert intervention in many of these internal struggles for local power increases the nationalist fervor of those opposing us and increases the opportunities for Soviet exploitation."

Mr. Mondale thinks that's naïve. A lot of other Americans may well consider it the bitter lesson of postwar experience.